

Wishes for 2023: ‘Quality’ tourism wanted as travellers return to Japan

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TOKYO – With the surge of tourists returning to Japan expected to continue in 2023 and beyond, long-term residents like myself can only wish for “quality travellers” who are more respectful of local customs and mindful of social etiquette.

Some visitors may plead ignorance – “nobody told me so” – but that is a sorry excuse for not educating oneself on the sensitivities that are key to the concept of harmony that is an important aspect of Japanese culture.

Bad behaviour by tourists had, in 2019 when Japan welcomed a record 31.8 million visitors, led some tourist sites and restaurants to impose rules – or even a complete ban – on foreigner visits.

There is even a term *kanko kogai* (“tourism pollution”) that came about as residents have suffered the brunt of misbehaviour of foreigners who cannot, or do not, follow the adage of *kuuki wo yomu* (“read the air”, or being sensitive to the atmosphere or mood of the people around them).

This can be grating: since [borders reopened in October](#) I have witnessed loud foreigners who disrupt the quiet of a subway ride – the etiquette is to stay quiet or talk softly as a courtesy to others – and a couple who could not keep their hands and lips off each other for an entire shinkansen ride.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. In 2018, the [bamboo forests of Arashiyama in Kyoto were defaced](#) by tourists who apparently

thought it was OK to carve their names onto the trees. In 2017, a Buddhist temple in Fukuoka banned foreigners on group tours after they played loud music and frolicked in an out-of-bounds waterfall used for Buddhism training.

All this only serves to fuel an “us-versus-them” mentality that, ultimately, is largely not true. Japan does not hate foreigners; what it hates is their bad behaviour.